

## *Reviews*

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### Perspectives on Lawrence

IT IS IN ONE SENSE a favorable circumstance for a reviewer that both Lawrence of Arabia and his debunker, Richard Aldington, are well known to me. It may also be considered a handicap. But that I am unable to agree with Aldington regarding the victim of his critical attack<sup>1</sup> can hardly be regarded as unfriendly.

I first saw Colonel Lawrence on my doorstep after he had scaled my gate, which I had locked, one fairly dark evening. I supposed he had gained admittance in this way in order to present me with a bill, and when I asked him very roughly who he was, holding his head down he whispered "T. E. Lawrence". After that he frequently visited me, as Aircraftsman Shaw, at the end of one of his long motor rides from one or other of his camps. I remember on one occasion he told me that General Allenby wished to propose him to the government

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<sup>1</sup>LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. A Biographical Enquiry, by *Richard Aldington*. Regnery. \$5.00.

as Governor of Egypt, or he may have said High Commissioner. This was one of Lawrence's "lies" according to Aldington, who says that he invented this story, to impress bombastically whoever it was he favoured with the tale, which, in Aldington's book, is described as totally without foundation. I asked Lawrence, at the time, why he did not accept. His answer was that if he found himself in the judgement seat, and some man, no matter who, in the dock before him, he would always feel that he should be where the accused was, and the accused in his position, as judge. Looking back on it, this answer seems to me now a somewhat theatrical one, but I cannot believe that Lawrence invented the story just to impress. As I read this in Aldington's book I felt sure that he was mistaken in citing this as an example of Lawrence's fantastic boasting.

In Aldington's book we learn that it was this claim by Lawrence to have been offered this particular job which caused him to write his debunk of Lawrence. "This (little episode) first aroused my suspicions of Lawrence's veracity and led me to find proof after proof that much he reports of himself—including and especially his Arabian experiences—was heightened, exaggerated, faked, boastful and sometimes entirely without foundation" (p. 381). These are Aldington's words; and it may therefore be assumed that all the other falsehoods that he tracks down are of a similar kind. So for my part, I am prejudiced against this book from the start, because I do not believe that this particular episode is what Aldington represents it to be. What I believe is that the question of this appointment had been discussed with Lawrence by Allenby (as he mentioned to me) and others; and however imprudent it may have been for Lawrence to speak of this privately to his friends, that it was not an "example of a systematic falsification and over-valuing of himself and his achievements" (see Aldington's Introductory Letter). Before the end of Aldington's massed attack on Lawrence of Arabia I was glad to find a foot-note as follows: "Sir Winston Churchill has since affirmed that although he never offered the post of High Commissioner to Lawrence officially he may have talked over the possibility of his being offered it unofficially with Lawrence." Although Sir Winston was at that time at the Colonial Office, and it was not in his power to appoint Lawrence High Commissioner of Egypt, nevertheless his office was a high one, and he would not be speaking idly if he discussed a possibility of that kind. The fact was that national politics in Egypt were in a dangerous state, and Lawrence probably did not want to find himself in Cairo, representing England, at a time of violence. He would be expected to act with great severity; but he was the Friend of the Arabs, and so would be put in a very difficult position. His account of the matter to me, quoted above, probably referred to this predicament. Had we been sitting in a restaurant, and had the people at the next table overheard this rather small and shabby man announcing that he had been offered Egypt but had refused it, their reaction would certainly have been that of Aldington, namely, that he was telling a

ridiculous lie. It is my opinion that he was doing nothing of the sort. From my personal knowledge of him, I am sure he would not have been capable of such a vulgar boastfulness. But the whole image of T. E. Lawrence, as created by Aldington—of one who was not only a pushing young particle, but criminally dishonest—does not correspond to what I saw. Whatever else he was, Lawrence was not a common little boaster; he was too intelligent to go round the town making up stories about himself.

There are many incidents in Aldington's book which depend, for their destructiveness, upon a rather inferior condition of mind. For instance, Lawrence's real name was not Lawrence. His father was an Irish baronet, Sir Thomas Robert Tighe Chapman, the seventh baronet. This gentleman left his wife and daughters in Ireland, and lived for the rest of his life under an assumed name, Lawrence, in England, in the company of a children's nurse of Scottish upbringing. It is difficult to determine what her name was, but it was not Lawrence. These facts, with a great deal of clamour, are revealed by Aldington in his book. If a man is unable to marry a woman he finds he loves better than his wife, is debarred from seeking a divorce, and, relinquishing his identity, lives with this second woman under an assumed name, that does not seem to me in any way disgraceful. The traditional bastard, as represented in Shakespeare's plays, would no doubt have had hard feelings regarding his position. But it is hardly likely that a young man living a middle-class life in North Oxford, would "suffer" in the manner suggested by Aldington upon learning that had he not been born out of wedlock he would have had a father belonging to the minor nobility.

However, out of this discovery of his, Aldington builds up a psychiatric case about Lawrence, the idol of the Crowd, the Prince of Mecca, and all the rest of it. He asserts that all Lawrence's life was distorted, that he never ceased to wish to inflate himself until he might grow to be the social equal of the baronet whose legitimate son he was not; that this caused him to descend to the most shameful tricks, to tell the most ingenious lies, so that Col. Lawrence might become a legend and be able to strut about as an historic figure, with his gold dagger stuck in his golden belt. This golden dagger, by the way, is an object of the darkest suspicion to Aldington. When did Lawrence obtain it? Is what is said true, that he slipped into Mecca and ordered it to be made to his own design by a goldsmith named Gasein? No, he thinks; as practically everything that Lawrence said was untrue, it must have some other origin—was it Hashemite gold, melted down from 150 captured Turkish sovereigns? No, again, says Aldington. For he suspects the Hashemites as much as he does their paymaster—"the main source of the Hashemite gold obviously was the lavish British subsidies" (footnote, p. 223). So with all the other gold scattered about his person, such as the bindings of his head-rope that was explained by Lawrence as follows: that "he put all his pay into the show". Aldington will not allow this, but believes that the British tax-payers' money was used for his adornment.

To show how it came about that Lawrence and his bodyguard practically swam in gold, Aldington quotes certain books to show in how rich a soil his suspicions have grown. First is the Army List, 1918, from which we gather that Lawrence had at the time an independent credit of 300,000 pounds, as well as the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and the D.S.O. With this solid economic background he began the life of an "Anglo-Semitic chieftain". "In those days," we are told, "every tribesman had sovereigns knotted in his clothes"; and the coast towns "were glugged with English gold". Any smaller chieftain that Lawrence wished to reward was told to plunge his hand into a bag full of sovereigns and keep as many as he could carry away. This method, he claimed, was economical, since the Sheiks thought it the last word in splendour, but it never cost more than one hundred and twenty pounds. Lawrence had bags of gold to the amount of thirty thousand pounds which he took to Zeid at Tafileh. Returning a little later he found that all this gold had evaporated among a group of lesser chieftains—which was, I should have thought, what it might have been expected to do. It is, apparently, vouched for. But let me here say that there appears to be no evidence of Lawrence keeping bags of gold for himself, or certainly we should have heard about it.

The nearest parallel to Col. Lawrence were the great leaders like Clive whose reputations have come under violent attack. For the first two years of the war Lawrence was in an office concerned mainly with the making of maps, and he never officially became a soldier, although they made him a Colonel, and decorated him with the D.S.O. All this reminds one of Anglo-Indian history. In Arabia he was surrounded by professional soldiers of great ability, like Dawnay and Young. He did, at Tafileh, conduct a purely military operation—Headquarters thought very brilliantly—and he received a D.S.O. for it. But it had none of the efficiency of Dawnay's action at Tell Shawn. Exactly what it was that gave Lawrence his great pre-eminence it is difficult to define.

His assumption of Arab dress was a very important factor. I asked him once if he spoke Arabic perfectly, and he answered "No, only 'kitchen arabic' ". But this kind of Arabic was precisely what served him so well, and undoubtedly he was preparing himself for his glorious career during the war by his archaeological experiences at Carchemish and elsewhere 1911 to 1914, as an undergraduate. During that period he made several journeys in the company of a young Arab named Dahoum, and in the excavations he spent a good deal of time with the Arab workmen, and was reported to have picked up much Arabic. This is no doubt where the 'kitchen arabic' came from.

If a person is anxious to learn a language, it has often been said that there is no better way of doing so than by forming an illicit relation with some woman of the country. Now, among many things that Aldington has found to help him blacken Lawrence with, there is one charge which I, for one, would not dispute; namely that Lawrence had homosexual tendencies. The Arabs at Carchemish were of opinion that Lawrence's relation with Dahoum was a homosexual one. Unpleasant as his habits were in this respect, one is bound to



trace back to his familiarity with Arab workmen, in undergraduate days, his successes with Arabs in general later on.

Sir Leonard Woolley asserted that the homosexual charge was unfounded. But he would be unlikely to admit that about anyone whom he regarded as a promising archaeologist. It is interesting to note, in a letter of Lawrence's of March 1912, how it was he, because of his command of Arabic, who acted for his chief in all matters where it was necessary to know the language. Here is a passage in which he apologises for being so bad a correspondent; he says, "You will allow for the amount of work that falls on one with Woolley a stranger to the country . . . I have to act interpreter for him always, though he is fairly fluent in Egyptian: I have to do the bargaining, and keep the accounts" (*Home Letters of T. E. Lawrence*, p. 196).

Let me say, in concluding the homosexual question, that the evidence of his oldest friend, Vyvyan Richards, contradicts that of Sir Leonard Woolley. Richards definitely says that he has always noticed how Lawrence was attracted by youths (see Vyvyan Richards on T. E. Lawrence, *Great Lives*). If it could be proved that the dedication of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* "To S. A." was in fact to Sheik Ahmed, or Dahoum, as Aldington claims it is, this would be very powerful evidence of Lawrence's sexual perversion. For Dahoum died during the War. Here is Lawrence's dedicatory poem:

*I loved you, so I drew these tides of men into my hands  
and wrote my will across the sky in stars  
To earn you Freedom, the seven pillared worthy house,  
that your eyes might be shining for me  
When we came.*

*Death seemed my servant on the road, till we were near  
and saw you waiting:  
When you smiled, and in sorrowful envy he outran me  
and took you apart;  
Into his quietness.*

*Love, the way-heavy, groped to your body, our brief ways  
ours for the moment  
Before earth's soft hand explored your shape, and the blind  
worms grew fat upon  
Your substance.*

*Men prayed me that I set out work, the inviolate house,  
as a memory of you.  
But for fit monument I shattered it, unfinished: and now  
The little things creep out to patch themselves hovels  
in the marred shadow  
Of your gift.*

The words "To earn you Freedom" indicate that this is to an Arab, and we may rule out the idea of a female Arab.

Next there is his main piece of self-expression, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. I do not agree with Aldington about the shortcomings of this book. I like it better now than I did at first; it seems to me very well written, and what is more important, in considering it in connection with Aldington's attack, it is very free of any of the kind of insincerity that a reader of Aldington's book would expect to find. Lawrence even displays great modesty in the manner in which he refers to the part he is playing in this military drama. Here is one passage, in which he and Dawnay are visiting Headquarters. "Seeing the undress working of a general's mind . . . was an experience; technical, reassuring, and very valuable to me, who was mildly a general, too, in my own odd show" (p. 553). Here is another instance. Lawrence was deeply dispirited by the misuse of the thirty thousand pounds worth of gold sovereigns left with Zeid. His bodyguard dispersed, he rode across country with four camels near British Headquarters. There he found his great friend Hogarth. He explained to him why he had come. "I confessed that I had made a mess of things; and had come to beg Allenby to find me some smaller part elsewhere. I had put all myself into the Arab business, and had come to wreck because of my sick judgment."

If Allenby had found for him some less important part, then there would have been no Lawrence legend. No one has spoken more disobligingly of Lawrence's achievement than Lawrence himself in the lines I have just quoted. Allenby, however, showed no weakening of his confidence in him, and thus confirmed in his great trust, Lawrence returned to the Arab levies. His own comment on the way the matter had turned out was as follows: "I must take up again my mantle of fraud in the East. With my certain contempt for half measures I took it up quickly and wrapped myself in it completely. It might be fraud or it might be force: no one should say that I could not play it." These words are anything but boastful.

There is no sign either of his inflating the record of his adventures, to suggest that he had been responsible for more than was the case. He takes you step by step across the desert, and shows no inclination to invent exciting episodes. More often than not the narrative is uneventful, and a less serious writer would have invented this or that in order to relieve the monotony.

It seems to me, also, that a careful reading disposes of the long belittlement of all his feats as "Uncrowned King of Arabia," as "Prince of Mecca" and so on. Apart from his lack of judgement regarding the question of the gold given to Zeid, and other key leaders, he handled the Arabs perfectly in a number of difficult situations. When the battle turned against the English, Jemal Pasha having entered Salt, and the Turks chasing Allenby down the Jordan Valley in a retreat that must have had the look of disaster for Lawrence's camelmen, he succeeded in steadying them and falling back in good order.

This is only one example of his influence on the Arabs—for the donkeyboys like Dahoum, whom he knew so well, were exactly the same kind of man as the camelmen, and if you understood one *à fond* you understood the other.

I have not spoken of something of great importance; namely, Lawrence's ambition, in freeing the Arabs from Turkish imperialism. I do not suppose, during his first visits to Arabia as an undergraduate, that any idea of this sort existed. But from the moment that he approached the Hashemite princes, proposing to them England's assistance to liberate them from the Turks, the ideal of Arabian emancipation never left him. He did not wish to go with a false promise of freedom to the Arabs, and persuade them to fight the Turks—to rebel against the Turkish Empire—and then find that they had thrown off one master in order to submit to another, imperial boss. Slowly he became aware of the treachery that he was being guilty of. From then on he began regarding England askance. When the end came, and he and his Arabs had entered Damascus, he asked General Allenby for permission to lay down all authority and to leave Arabia. And his impulse to join the Air Force, and offer himself for the most humble forms of duty, was understood to be a comment on the betrayal he had been led into while holding a relatively exalted rank.

We realise all the hatred aroused by debunkers, and what considerations produce these feelings. But I know Aldington well enough to feel quite sure that the pain his book would cause to the mother of this fabulous man is an issue which would never be present to him. I have good reason for seeing Aldington as a man capable of very generous actions. But his eye is a barrack-room eye, and he quite genuinely feels, I am sure, that Lawrence has secured that glittering military prize cheaply; that there was a lot of showing up to be done, and that he was just the man to do it.

He is not the man to see the Hero. He sees that the commonest soldier is a hero; this he celebrated in his best-known book, *The Death of a Hero*. Sir Winston Churchill has a different way of seeing things and he saw in Lawrence the outline of one of the greatest destinies. "The War," he said, "stopped too soon to satisfy Lawrence's destiny." Here is what he says. "I have often wondered what would have happened to Lawrence if the Great War had continued for several more years. His fame was spreading fast and with the momentum of the fabulous throughout Asia. . . . No one could say what was impossible. Lawrence might have realised Napoleon's young dream of conquering the East; he might have arrived at Constantinople in 1919 or 1920 with most of the tribes and races of Asia Minor and Arabia at his back."

Lawrence's valour has never been doubted even by Aldington. So this small man with the large head, the "Oxford aesthete" who had read all the standard books of military science and was full of ideas of Arab Freedom, was one of the world's most romantic captains, one most originally endowed. As for his sexual perversion, he had a deplorable model in Julius Caesar, a war-lord of the greatest fame. The same strange feminine intermixture in Lawrence's nature

caused him to adopt the becoming Arab costume, and so become one of the most picturesque military adventurers in European history. Lawrence summed his own life up excellently. It took the form of an epigram. "I was an Irish nobody. I did something. It was a failure. And I became an Irish nobody again."

He meant of course, that the Arabs got nothing out of their Revolt in the Desert. It is an excellent epitaph on a career.



From the perusal of nearly 400 pages of T. E. Lawrence's letters<sup>2</sup> an intimate knowledge of his youth and young manhood may be derived. All the early letters are almost purely architectural. He was exclusively interested in castles and churches; and for many pages the reader of these letters will clamber over Norman and other castles, noting the structure of machicoulis, the numbers and positions of latrines, and the height of towers. For years this was all, apparently, that interested Lawrence—the result of possessing for a father a baronet masquerading as a commoner. Wide as were his architectural interests, if one had to say what in detail was his favourite subject, one would be compelled to answer Mediaeval Plumbing.

A very good instance of this is to be met with at the beginning of the book, page 4. He is then still sixteen years old, and has gone to Norwich with his father. He writes about his brother Will's disappointment that he leaves unvisited a superb collection of birds. "There was the largest collection of raptorial birds in existence, 409 out of 470 species: I wonder if he [his brother Will] will shriek with horror when he hears that I did not look at them but went off and examined the Norman W.C.s." Here you have, brutally underlined, while he was still a school boy, the peculiar way in which his interests differ from those of his brothers. And his interest in castles remains with him. In 1910 he obtained his degree (1st Class Honours in Modern History) at Oxford with a thesis on "Crusader Castles." He advanced an original theory, which Aldington, of course, repudiates.

In these letters there is a great deal about bicycle journeys in France, and in these this schoolboy tends to identify a kilometre with an English mile, and claims to have ridden a greater number of miles a day than was quite likely. This adolescent boasting Aldington seizes on as evidence that later, as a soldier, he was to inflate his achievements. This seems to me absurd; for when a schoolboy, on a bicycle, has pedalled his head off all day, it is not to be taken as a proof of general unreliability if he tells his mother in a letter that he has covered a little more ground than in fact was the case. Lawrence remained a scorcher until the end of his life; in fact he killed himself attempting to get more miles out of a motor-bike than it has in it to give. This is

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<sup>2</sup>THE HOME LETTERS OF T. E. LAWRENCE AND HIS BROTHERS. Macmillan Company. New York. 1954. \$10.



a pardonable eccentricity, and it was, of course, some deep-seated juvenility which remained in him which caused his death. The Aldington book naturally coloured all these letters for me. If I had read them quite unaware of the destiny of their author, what would my opinion have been? I should have been charmed, of course, by these schoolboy missives, without a trace of anything else in the mind of this young man than all the pleasure he got out of exhibiting himself (to his mother) very learned about old churches and castles. As he became a little older, and since he lived in so central a place as Oxford, I should be surprised not to find any signs of an interest in creative literature: for instance, in a book like the *Sons and Lovers* of D. H. Lawrence, or in any French reading, even in translation. If I had heard in a preface to this book that the author of these letters had claimed to have read half the Union library, I should have been surprised not to have found evidences of this reading in the letters. There would, in short, have been a complete absence of intellectual matter to note, rather than its presence.

These letters of one who only a few years later is going to be the famous Colonel Lawrence, are conspicuously not the letters of an "intellectual." And if one adds that Lawrence is not only to become a famous soldier, but also to have intellectual pretensions, and to write books such as *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *The Mint*, it is a rather curious fact that these letters should be so devoid of intellectual content.

Another thing to remember is that there was nothing of the "late colt" about Lawrence. The centre of his life is in his early days. As the great Arabian adventurer he was surrounded by people older than himself. You have, in these letters, a record of what was probably the happiest period in his life: namely the undergraduate years spent in archaeological excavations at Carchemish on the Euphrates. He distinguished himself, was very popular, and his eventual championship of Arab Freedom began to take shape there.

Prior to that, he undertook an expedition on foot, from Beirut to Sidon and beyond. He was still collecting Crusader Castles. Pages 88 to 99 are among the most interesting in the book. You first learn exactly what the food of this country is, and then, stopping with a peasant when night arrives, you move down the coast. As to the Holy Land, "everywhere one finds remains of splendid Roman roads, and houses, and public buildings." He tells us that "the sooner the Jews farm it all the better: their colonies are bright spots in a desert." His tramp was a very interesting one, and is evidence of his youthful enterprise. He was then twenty years old.

In November 1914 he is sent from London to Cairo as an Intelligence official of some kind. His knowledge of Arabic, and acquaintance with the country south of Beirut and elsewhere, made him of use for the drawing of maps to be employed by the military. This continued for the first two years of the War. Then, in March 1916, he wrote to his family, "I am going away, for a month or six weeks, to consult with some people, and suggest certain things. Is this vague enough?"

He was to visit the British Headquarters on the Tigris, in front of Kut. His very inconspicuous, bureaucratic life was at an end. Shortly after that began his experiences in Arabia. In his letter home he does not describe where he is going or what the nature of his task is to be, but he is constantly referring to expeditions away from Cairo, and then the nature of his activities is more defined. But he writes, "I cannot enter into details." He says of his mission: "The position I have is such a queer one—I do not suppose that any Englishman before ever had such a place. . . . I act as a sort of advisor to Sherif Feisal, and as we are on the best of terms, the job is a wide and pleasant one. I live with him, in his tent."

Lawrence is admitted by everyone to have had a considerable influence on the Arabs, Feisal being the most prominent; this is explained by Aldington by the fact of his having received from two to five hundred thousand pounds (in golden sovereigns). But in these letters home there is nothing about all that. In fact, the letters stop to all intents and purposes when the War begins. In sum, they present Lawrence as a youth and young man very fully indeed, and show how cordial his relations were with his father and mother, and how his brothers looked upon him as a superior being.



The dedication to *The Mint*<sup>3</sup> runs as follows: "To Edward Garnett. 'You dreamed I came one night with this book, crying, "Here's a masterpiece, Burn it." Well—as you please.'"

It is a little surprising that Lawrence should have referred to *The Mint* as a masterpiece. It is anything but that. But it is an extremely curious document. It scrupulously narrates the initiation of a Royal Air Force recruit. From the medical examination down to the muck-cart, we are told everything that happened to Lawrence in the course of becoming Aircraftsman Shaw. It is not really very interesting, except that it is happening to so famous a man.

But certain statements that Lawrence makes in the course of this narrative, if nothing else, enable us to unravel a mystery—the mysterious behaviour of one of World War One's most romantic leaders. For why should a man who had occupied so enviable a position have sought to enlist, the moment the war was over, under an assumed name, as a humble mechanic? There is nothing in military history quite so odd.

Aldington is at a loss to find any particular dishonourable reason for Lawrence to have enlisted in the Air Force in this way. All he can think of is this: "Such was the impasse into which he had been driven by the complicated motives of his family situation, his neurosis, and the vanity that he tried to conceal behind his masks and subtleties." In other words, what drove him into the Air Force, to work as a mechanic, was the fact that his father had been a baronet living under an assumed name, which made Lawrence very

<sup>3</sup>THE MINT, by T. E. Lawrence. Doubleday. \$20.00.

neurotic. He was weighed down with the thought that he had been born out of wedlock. The improbability of such an obsession it is hardly necessary for me to point out. At the time, what was most generally believed was that Allenby's brilliant associate was engaged in some theatrical abasement, because of the betrayal of the Arabs, as he saw it, by the British government. *The Mint* leaves one with another explanation.

In the first place *The Mint*, in its literary style, suggests a reading of James Joyce. In the unexpurgated edition what we get is a realistic narrative, without any graces or urbanities, but as accurate a transcription as possible of the tirelessly sexual obscenities of army life. As an anonymous story of a sensitive recruit, it would pass as a piece of first-hand reporting, nothing more. Any interest lies solely in the identity of the narrator. One is engaged the whole time in wondering what Lawrence's reason could be for undergoing such an ordeal.

At the time of his enlistment in the R.A.F. Lawrence was a rather undersized but tough little man, thirty-five years old. He was able to run about on fatigues, to do endless drilling, to live on Army rations, to sleep in a noisy hut, to get through all this quite creditably. But merely physically, it was a strain. Often at night, he got into his bed dead beat—or on to his "biscuits", as the sections of bed were called.

"I am dog-weary at the end of each week and begin every new week fatigued. Evening finds me tired. With the work done and fearful of the morrow" (p. 150).

The great Generals, Marshall of the R.A.F., Lord Trenchard, and the rest, who began to watch over his destiny, were responsible for his dismissal from the R.A.F. and his enlistment in the Tank Corps, and then his reenlistment in the R.A.F., which last reinstatement was engineered in the highest places—the Prime Minister, Lord Baldwin, being eventually brought into the pressuring which resulted in Lawrence finding himself once more an Aircraft mechanic.

As we go on marvelling at the endurance of this man, who had risen so high in the esteem of the world, and then had projected himself downwards to the most menial military occupations, we do, in the end, reach an understanding of what impulse it was that sustained him in this effort.

During his service in India he may have read some Indian philosophy; in any case, it is towards traditional Hindu doctrine that one's mind turns for thinking of the type in which Lawrence was indulging. He was saying farewell to ambition, in an act of social suicide: but the self-destroying teaching of the followers of Mahavira would not have influenced him. Doctrines to be found in some Buddhist monastery would be more likely to provide us with a method of thinking that would enable us to understand the kind of life adopted by this metaphysical boy-scout.

Near the end of his life the following words expressed his great despondency. "Days seem to dawn, suns to shine, evenings to follow, and then I sleep. What I have done, what I am doing, what I am going to do, puzzle me and bewilder

me. Have you ever been a leaf and fallen from your tree in autumn and been really puzzled about it? 'That's the feeling.'

It was partly to escape this puzzled autumn-leaf falling that he attached himself blindly and aggressively to a dynamic body like the Royal Air Force. Here are the last words of *The Mint*:

Service life in this way teaches a man to live largely on little. We belong to a big thing, which will exist for ever and ever in unnumbered generations of standard airmen, like ourselves. Our outward sameness of dress and type remind us of that. Also our segregation and concentration. The clusters of us widen out beyond Cadet College . . . over half the world. The habit of "belonging to something or other" induces in us a sense of being one part of many things.

As we gain attachment, so we strip ourselves of personality . . . Airmen have no possessions, few ties, little daily care. For me, duty now orders only the brightness of these five buttons down my front.

And airmen are cared for as little as they care. . . . Everywhere a relationship: no loneliness any more.



For the last biographer of Lawrence, an Englishwoman living in New York, he is a hero. The book<sup>4</sup> is well-written, and, for those who have no taste for debunking, strongly to be recommended. The account of Lawrence's years in Syria, as a young archaeologist, is admirable. The account given of his life at Carchemish is an improvement on what has been written up to now elsewhere, and one obtains a very clear idea of the scene—from the Hittite cups, four thousand years old, out of which they drank their tea, to the great number of men, of one race and another, whom they employed. Lawrence played a considerable part in the contriving of the quarters of the archaeologists, with the Roman tessellated pavement, and the bath they secured in spite of Turkish interference.

Miss Armitage is very firm on the subject of homosexuality, and even when we reach Deraa no suspicion that Lawrence had rather a taste for sexual punishment is allowed. She accepts the theory of outraged virginity. I consider Deraa the only blemish in an otherwise sensible book.

To return to the first days in England, there is, I think, about her attitude to Lawrence's illegitimacy, an inclination on Miss Armitage's part to endorse the view attributing great importance to this in Lawrence's life. I cannot believe that suddenly to discover that one's father was a baronet in disguise would be anything but a stimulus to most young men; and let me add that the fact that one's mother was only a commoner would not obliterate the pleasing effect. The lack of marriage lines would not outweigh the stimulus to which

<sup>4</sup>THE DESERT AND THE STARS; a Biography of Lawrence of Arabia, by *Flora Armitage*. Holt. \$4.00.



I have referred. The American may find it more difficult to understand the niceties of this question than someone hailing from England or Ireland.

Passing over the problem resulting from this psychological error, let me hasten to say that in this book a very full account is given of Lawrence's schooling and academic associations. It has been said that if you entered the quadrangle of Jesus College, Oxford, and shouted "Jones", half the windows in the College would fly open, and the occupants would stick their heads out. Lawrence became a member of that College because he had, quite accidentally, been born in Wales. One learns, in the fullest detail, what were his academic attainments—and what they were not. I remember asking Lawrence why he did not adopt the life of a Don: to which he answered that he could not do that, he did not know Latin and Greek. I had not in those days read the various studies of Lawrence's life which I have since, and I had supposed that he left a donnish career to become a soldier. My multifarious biographical reading has thrown a new light for me upon the small figure of the Bohemian boy scout which became familiar to me in the days of his motor-cycling from camp to metropolis. I never saw him out of dusty khaki, or else uniformed in Air Force blue—the days of his Arabian grandeur left far behind. He, of course, was modesty itself, and he had no desire to be thought of as a celebrated Emperor of the Desert. What he hoped to be was a great writer, like Doughty of *Arabia Deserta*; if he could have become that, I am quite sure he would have abandoned all idea of ranking high among the military.

In looking back at this book of Miss Armitage, I principally think of it as showing splendidly how this small, untidy man came up out of the excavations at Carchemish, to become the strangely famous leader of the Arabs, from Medina, up the Jordan Valley, to Syria, which he already knew so well. The fact that he was not ever a soldier, that his position in Arabia was so ornate but equivocal, was displeasing to the British officers in Cairo and elsewhere. It is wonderful to read how he received the D.S.O., or was made a Major or a Colonel, without ever having risen through the drudgery of ordinary army life. All this is extremely well told in *The Desert and the Stars*.

What is rather unusual in this book is the way in which the notion of Lawrence's romantic obsession with Arabian Freedom is exploded. It is gratifying how thoroughly that idea is disposed of: how it is shown that he was far too intelligent ever to imagine that the war would result in the ideal emergence of a powerful and independent Arabian State. To have brought this out so clearly is very much to Miss Armitage's credit. She shows Lawrence to us, looking coldly and clearly, Irishman that he was, at his exploits.

On the whole, I would like to recommend this book to anyone who wishes to instruct himself about this dazzling figure. Lawrence was much less of a mountebank than it is very easy to represent him. Allowing for Miss Armitage's hero-worship, a reader can come very near the truth, I believe, in perusing this book intelligently.